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ABSTRACT

A group of university students consisting of native speakers of Chinese (n=63), Japanese (n=33), Korean (n=21), Indonesian (n=20), and Arabic (n=13) with relatively extensive exposure to the American university environment and a control group of 20 native English-speakers were asked to rank the social appropriateness of 104 conversation topics. Group responses were analyzed for correlation across language groups. Topics were clustered in these categories: family and family members; age (own and family); classes/grades/teachers; hearer (possessions, self, etc.); money (own/family); own possessions; life in the United States; recreation/weather/travel; self (tastes, experiences); and residence. Results show high correlation in judgments of topics pertaining to family and to classes/grades/teachers. There was less agreement about the appropriateness of topics pertaining to age, money, the hearer, personal possessions, life in the United States, recreation, self, and residence. The questionnaire and data summaries for topic clusters are appended. Contains 26 references. (Author/MSE)

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TOPIC APPROPRIATENESS IN CROSS-CULTURAL SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Among the major features characterizing social conversations, topics play a crucial role in the success of an interaction, yet judgments of what topics are appropriate for casual conversations can vary between different language groups. If a speaker pursues a conversational topic that is considered inappropriate by the hearer, the hearer may be unable or unwilling to respond in the way that the speaker expects. In this case, the speaker's cooperative intent may not be understood by the hearer, and the interaction may not be successful for reasons not that are not always easy for the participants to identify. One hundred and seventy participants in this study (speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Arabic, along with a NS control group) evaluated on a 10-point Lickert scale the appropriateness of 104 conversational topics. There was a high correlation among the participants in their judgments of topics pertaining to *Family* and to *Classes, grades, and teachers*. There was less agreement about the appropriateness of topics pertaining to *Age, Money, the Hearer, Personal possessions, Life in the U.S.A., Recreation, Self,* and *Residence*.

INTRODUCTION

Many ESL programs in the U.S. define their curricular goals as providing students with language skills to achieve their academic and social goals. Over the past ten years, ESL professionals have come to recognize that in addition to acquiring skills in L2 reading, writing, and grammar, students need to develop skills to deal with the variety of social interactions, both on campus and beyond, that they regularly face. It has also been noted that successful social interactions can become additional sources of exposure to L2 and may, therefore, facilitate L2 acquisition (Adamson & Regan, 1991; Scarcella, 1990).

Social conversations, even at the peer level, are complex, and many linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural notions come into play. Research has shown that such factors as familiarity of the participants, time of the interaction and time available for the conversation, situation and the environment in which the exchange takes place, and intention have a considerable impact on

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interaction (Wardhaugh, 1985; Cocchi, 1992). Among the elements of conversations, such as initiating, turn-taking, interrupting, closing, and terminating, the choice of topics appears to be one of the most specifically defined (Wardhaugh, 1985).

Schneider (1988) found that among the major features characterizing social conversations, topics play a crucial role in the success of interaction. Marsh (1989, p. 89) states that different notions of what topics are appropriate in casual and cross-cultural social exchanges "could seriously affect speakers engaged in cross-cultural communication with those from more distant speech communities." Befu (1986) indicates that in conversations between Japanese and Americans, for example, the topics of social conversations between strangers and acquaintances can determine the success (or failure) of the interaction.

What, in fact, represents a conversational topic has been a subject of debate among linguists. Various scholars have defined the notion of discourse topic differently (Clark & Haviland, 1977; van Dijk, 1977, 1980; Schank, 1977; McLaughlin, 1984). Many researchers have asserted that topics are not static, and that they are continually initiated, negotiated, developed, expanded, shifted, and terminated (Brown & Yule, 1983; Tannen, 1984). Gardner (1984) states that it is frequently impossible to tell where in a conversation a topic is maintained, developed, expanded, or changed. On the other hand, Laver (1975, 1981) and Schneider (1988) found that language users have little difficulty specifically defining topics. In fact, Tannen (1984) indicated that naming conversational topics is a common discourse task, e.g. when the speaker or the hearer is asked what a conversation was about, they can usually clearly state what the topic was.

Choosing appropriate topics is a component of the overall conversational politeness strategy as the participants must decide not only what topics to include but also which ones to avoid (Cocchi, 1992). Topics can be inappropriate for a variety of reasons, as some can prove to be embarrassing and/or painful either to an individual or a group in the role of the hearer (Wardhaugh, 1985).

Wardhaugh (1985) observes that communication breakdowns often occur when the parties are from different ethnic, cultural, and/or social backgrounds because "taking part in a conversation requires cooperation and participation" (p. 52). He notes that in a conversation, participants, however passive, are always "at risk" (p. 54) because they have to play either the role of the speaker or the role of the hearer, both of which entail cooperation. In addition to the visible and much discussed role of the speaker in interaction, the hearer's task is to discern the speaker's intent and purpose and to respond accordingly. If a speaker pursues a conversational topic that is considered inappropriate by the hearer, the latter may be unable or unwilling to respond in the way that the former expects (Recanati, 1991). In this case, the speaker's cooperative intent may not be understood by the hearer, and the interaction may not be successful for reasons not that are not always easy for one or other of the participants to identify.

Many observers have tried to make a list of the topics appropriate and inappropriate in cross-cultural interactions between Americans and speakers of other languages. Hu & Grove (1991, p. 27) state that the selection of the topic in social interactions, for example between Chinese and Americans, should be made with caution, and the authors provide an extensive list of topic "restrictions." Similarly, Masuda (1990) cautions her Japanese audience that Americans consider such topics as individual's health, habits, and marital status intrusive. According to Park (1979, pp. 57-60), many Americans complain that Koreans dwell on personal conversa-

tional topics and often ask inappropriate questions; on the other hand, the author reports being annoyed at the questions that Americans asked him: "How do you like your food?" or "How do you like the United States?" Nydell (1987) dedicates an entire chapter to the discussion of appropriate and inappropriate topics in conversations between Arabs and Americans and highlights those that can be considered "sensitive" (pp. 41-43) by either party.

Although such general guides can be useful, individual variation, context, gender, socio-economic class, and other discrete factors, in addition to the essential liquidity of conversations and topic, makes listing safe and dangerous topics rather difficult. The conversational appropriateness of discussing money has been discussed by many authors, and stories of awkward social situations when money was brought up in ways that Americans considered inappropriate abound. Yet Chinese students who have been told that Americans don't discuss money have been puzzled when American classmates have reported buying sandals for $5.00, getting $100 for a birthday present, or taking a summer job that pays $12.00 an hour.

The purpose of this paper is to establish whether correlation exists between NS and NNS judgments of appropriateness of topics commonly encountered in social interactions and casual conversations. Teaching various aspects of appropriateness in face-to-face interactions is an important component of a communicative syllabus (Marsh, 1989), and the ultimate goal of this investigation is to provide findings that can be incorporated in communicative curriculum and/or training materials for NNSs learning ESL or Americans who frequently interact with NNSs. In general terms, because there are no "objective" means of measuring topic appropriateness, familiarity with relative notions of topic appropriateness in social conversations can prepare all parties for roles as the speaker and the hearer.

To date, little conversational data has been collected for the analysis of topic appropriateness in cross-cultural interactions between Westerners and non-Westerners. This study should be viewed as preliminary and, therefore, limited in scope and application.

SUBJECTS

Of the 170 subjects who participated in the study, 20 were NSs of American English residing in Ohio, Kentucky, or Indiana (NSs); 63 were speakers of Chinese (CH), 33 of Japanese (JP), 21 of Korean (KR), 20 of Indonesian (IND), and 13 of Arabic (AR). All subjects were enrolled at in various departments at the Ohio State University; their ages ranged from 19 to 33.

The NNSs subjects were highly advanced learners with a mean TOEFL score of 587 and had resided in the U.S. for periods of time ranging between 1 and 4 years with a mean of 2.2. It follows that the subjects had had a relatively extensive exposure to the L2 community and its socio-pragmatic norms and interactional frameworks. A shorter length of residence in the host community and exposure to its norms of appropriateness may cause greater variability in subjects' responses.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

Topic Selection

During the initial stages of the study, topics for social and/or conversations between acquaintances (*someone whom you know but who is not a close friend*) were solicited from 45 university students. Of that number, 7 were NSs of American English, 15 of Chinese, 9 of Japanese, 5 each of Korean and Indonesian, and 4 of Arabic. An initial total of 168 topics were collected. After redundancies were eliminated, the remaining 104 topics were included in the questionnaire in the form of phrases and clauses (e.g. *my life in the U.S.* and *why I came to the U.S.*) (Tannen, 1984). These topics largely belonged to ten thematic clusters, such as *family/family members* (15 items); *classes/grades/teachers* (9 items); and *recreation/weather/travel* (12 items) (see Appendix A for a complete list). In the actual questionnaire the topics were presented in random order.

Because all topics in the questionnaire were elicited from students, the number of topics in the clusters was uneven and ranged from 5 associated with *Age* to 15 pertaining to *Family and family members*. Furthermore, because topics were elicited from a relatively young population, most of whom were unmarried, the questionnaire did not contain topics dealing with spouses, children, or other issues relevant to older populations.

The Frame

Schneider's (1988) investigation showed that food and drink establishments represent one of the single most common contexts and/or environments for social interaction and casual talk. For this reason, the situational setting for the instrument was described as a restaurant. In keeping with the findings of Schneider (1988), Tannen (1984), and Wardhaugh (1985), in order to allow the subjects to concentrate on interactional topics, the following parameters for other social conversation variables were established in the questionnaire: the time of day and the length of the interaction were defined as lunch and about an hour, the social distance between the participants was delineated as a peer acquaintance, the type of interaction as social/conversational (i.e. *you talk about all kinds of things*), and the implicit intention as cooperative. The questionnaire instructions (see Appendix A) to the subjects outlined an imaginary conversation counter-part, i.e., *a student from your department*. The instructions on the questionnaires for NSs indicated a foreign student and the forms for NNSs an American student.

> *N.H. is a [foreign/American] student in your department. The two of you entered the program at the same time and have similar interests in your majors. You have lunch together frequently at a restaurant near campus and spend about an hour together. When you have lunch, you talk about all kinds of things.*

The Scale

The subjects were asked to rank the appropriateness of 104 conversational topics on a 10-point Lickert scale, ranging from very inappropriate (1) to very appropriate (10).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rankings assigned to the appropriateness of a particular topic by subjects with the same L1 were averaged to obtain group rankings for each topic. The resulting averages were analyzed in two ways:

(1) The rankings of topics within a thematic cluster were tested for consistency and Kendall's Coefficients of Concordance (*W*) were obtained across L1 groups.
(2) Correlation coefficients were computed for each topic cluster based on average L1 group rankings to establish the amount of association between each pair.

The Concordance of Rankings

Group rankings were tested for consistency across L1 groups, utilizing Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (*W*). The results indicate (see Table 1) that expectably, the concordance in the subjects' judgments of topic appropriateness depended on the topic.

Specifically, the amount of agreement among ranks was high for the topic clusters associated with *Family and family members, Age, Classes, grades, and teachers, Hearer, Money,* and *Own possessions*, with (*W*'s) ranging from .89 to .67 ($p < .001$). These values imply that overall, regardless of their L1s, the group rankings exhibited systematic similarities.

The subjects' judgments of appropriateness across L1 groups were moderately consistent on topics pertaining to *Life in the U.S.A., Recreation, weather, and travel,* and *Self*, (*W*) of .56, .53, and .53 ($p < .001$), respectively. The Coefficient of Concordance associated with the topic cluster *Residence* ($W = .27$) was not significant, i.e. rankings among groups were markedly distinct.

Table 1
Kendall's Coefficients of Concordance (*W*) Across L1 Groups

Topic Cluster	Number of Topics in Cluster	Kendall's (*W*)	Level of significance
Family/family members	15	.89	($p < .001$)
Age (own and family)	5	.78	($p < .001$)
Classes/grades/teachers	9	.75	($p < .001$)
Hearer (possessions/self, etc.)	11	.70	($p < .001$)
Money (own/family)	12	.69	($p < .001$)
Own possessions	7	.67	($p < .001$)
Life in the U.S.A.	14	.56	($p < .001$)
Recreation/weather/travel	11	.53	($p < .001$)
Self (tastes/experiences)	12	.53	($p < .001$)
Residence	8	.27	not significant

Correlations between Subjects' Rankings

The analysis of data below follows the order of concordance coefficients established in Table 1 and examines correlations of rankings in greater detail. To determine associations between the average rankings of conversational topic appropriateness by L1 groups, rank-difference coefficients between each pair of L1-based groups were obtained for the 10 topic clusters outlined in Table 1. (For the full set of values pertaining to the 10 correlation matrices, see Appendix B). However, because this study is primarily concerned with similarities and differences in the appropriateness rankings of conversational topics for incorporation in ESL curriculum, the correlation coefficients between NSs and NNSs were extracted and are selectively presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Extracted Rank Correlation Coefficients between NSs and NNSs, by Group

	Topic Clusters									
	Fam	Age	Classes	H	Money	Poss	U.S.	Rec	Self	Res
	NSs	NSs	NSs	NSs	NSs	NSs	NSs	NSs	NSs	NSs
CH	.92*	.67	.80*	-.23	.64*	.21	.53	.80*	.19	.98*
JP	.75*	.30	.80*	.80*	.58	.96*	.56*	.59*	.20	-.10
KR	.90*	.90*	.60	.74*	.37	.83*	.31	.33	.17	-.81*
IN	.84*	.98*	.90*	.47	.52	.90*	.58*	.45	.03	.41
AR	.91*	.70	.76*	.73*	.51	.68	.45	.29	.15	.90*

* significant at (p £ .05)

[Abbreviations: Family = Fam, Hearer = H, Possessions = Poss, Life in the U.S. = U.S., Recreation = Rec, Residence = Res.]

Family

As the data in Table 2 show, on the topic cluster *Family*, the correlation coefficients between the rankings of NNSs in all L1 groups and NSs are high and significant, with an implication that subjects' perceptions of appropriateness of these topics were similar, regardless of their L1s. Therefore, it follows that relying on NS judgments of appropriateness when discussing family and family members in social conversations is a fairly safe venue among NSs, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Indonesians, and Arabs.

Age

However, this does not hold true for the topic cluster associated with *Age*. In particular, the correlation coefficients of subject's rankings were high and significant only between NSs and Indonesians (.98), and NSs and Koreans (.90). In popular literature describing interactions

of Americans with people from other cultures, age is frequently described as a troublesome topic, and Americans have often reported feeling uncomfortable when asked how old they are and how old members of their families are (Nydell, 1987; Lii-Shi, 1988; Masuda, 1990). However, the high positive correlations between the judgments of appropriateness of NSs and Koreans and NSs and Indonesians regarding *Age*-topics indicates that NSs may not be unique and that perceptions of Koreans and Indonesians regarding the appropriateness of *Age* are in a strong direct relationship. In fact, Park (1979) and Smith-Hefner (1988) state that in Korea and Indonesia, respectively, when dealing with females without children, males without sons, and/or unmarried males in their thirties, discussions associated with *Age* are largely uncomfortable and can be viewed as inappropriate.

The rankings of appropriateness for the topics of *Age* were also high, although not statistically significant, between NSs and the speakers of Arabic and Chinese. Nydell (1987) and Hu & Grove (1991) mention that Arabs and Chinese, respectively, seem to be more open about their age than Americans, although numerous social constraints also apply. Chinese unmarried and/or middle aged women, as well as childless Arab men and women, and those without sons may find the topic inappropriate. The correlation between the rankings of NSs and the Japanese were low (.30), indicating that speakers of American English and Japanese may have different views on whether conversations about *Age* are appropriate in social interactions.

Classes

The correlations between the NS and NNS subjects' evaluations of the appropriateness of discussing *Classes, grades, and teachers* were high and significant between NSs and all NNS groups, except NSs and Koreans, whose rankings correlated marginally (.60). It would seem that native judgments regarding the appropriateness of topics dealing with academics are also fairly reliable guides.

Hearer

In topics focusing on the *Hearer*, such as his or her past experiences, political beliefs, likes and dislikes, the rankings by NSs significantly correlated with those by the speakers of Japanese, Korean, and Arabic. The Indonesians' perceptions of the appropriateness of topics in this cluster exhibited marginal correlations with those of NSs. Those between NSs and Chinese subjects showed a weak inverse relationship (-.23).

Money

The rankings of all NNS groups, except Chinese, showed no significant relationship to those of NSs, with an implication that the speakers of Korean, Indonesian, and Arabic rated the appropriateness of *Money* as a conversational device differently than NSs. The views of the Japanese and NSs showed a marginal association (.58), and rankings of Chinese and NSs demonstrated a moderately significant correlation (.64).

Own Possessions

The topic cluster dealing with *Own possessions* exhibited a great deal of diversity in the subjects' rankings. Strong direct relationships are observed between the rankings of NSs and the Japanese (.96), NSs and Indonesians (.90), and NSs and Koreans (.83). The evaluations by

the speakers of Arabic showed a moderate correlation to those by NSs (.68), while the rankings by the Chinese exhibited little relationship to those by NSs (.21). Lii-Shi (1988) notes that although the Chinese consider discussing their belongings appropriate, they may feel less inclined to talk about the exclusivity of their possessions because they could be seen as braggarts. She also observes that Americans, unlike the Chinese, may not even say that they own an expensive item, such as a computer, for fear of being perceived negatively, a difference in perception of appropriateness that both Americans and the Chinese find bewildering when dealing with one another.

Life in the U.S.A.

The subjects' rankings of the topics dealing with *Life in the U.S.A.* showed no high correlation coefficients, although two were significant, i.e. between NSs and Indonesians (.58), and NSs and Japanese (.56). The absence of strong correlations of rankings and the relatively low amount of consistency with which the subjects ranked the topics in this cluster is not particularly surprising. NS subjects were evaluating the appropriateness of talking about life in their home country, the characteristics of Americans – the population to which they belonged – and the usage of their native language, i.e. topics in which they were or considered themselves experts. Furthermore, when NSs discuss their own country, culture, and/or language, they would clearly feel and display affect different from that of NNSs, often seen as outsiders (Adamson & Regan, 1991; Brown, 1986).

While in social conversations foreigners are routinely asked *Where are you from?, What do you think about this country?,* and *How do you like it here?* (Schneider, 1988), it appears that NSs and NNSs have different perceptions of appropriateness associated with the specific aspects of this topic. Although Schneider (1988) mentions that various aspects of native and host countries represent ritualized and "neutral" (p. 243) conversational topics between NSs and NNSs, his findings, which deal exclusively with speakers of British English, German, and French, may not be fully applicable to members of cultures other than Western.

Another factor to consider is that NS and NNS subjects were uncertain as to whether topics concerned with perceptions of *Life in the U.S.* would be appropriate. Possibly, NNSs were concerned about inadvertently offending their imaginary American counter-part (Nydell, 1987; Lii-Shi, 1988; Park, 1979). Similarly, when the topics of *Life in the U.S.* are involved, NSs may think that NNSs are being critical, which is not necessarily the case (Crane, 1978; Hu & Grove, 1991).

Recreation, Weather, and Travel

While the correlation coefficient between rankings of NSs and the Chinese on the topics *of Recreation, weather, and travel* was high (.80), and that between NSs and the Japanese was moderate (.59), the evaluations of Koreans, Indonesians, and Arabs did not correlate strongly with those of NSs. Recreation and weather in particular have been traditionally viewed as very "safe" conversational topics, so much so that many speakers of American and British English, German, and French consider them trite (Laver, 1975; Schneider, 1988). Schneider (1988) computed that out of 33 social conversations in his data, 23 contained weather and recreation sequences, and "some more than one" (p. 213). Because the topics associated with recreation and weather are often considered neutral, they are often included, discussed, and exemplified

in ESL textbooks for teaching speaking skills and strategies.

It appears, however, that topics pertaining to recreation and weather should not be assumed generally appropriate in cross-cultural conversations in which participants are non-Westerners. Specifically, apart from the Chinese, whose rankings of appropriateness of *Recreation, weather, and travel* topics showed a reasonably direct correlation with that of NSs (.80), the judgments of other NNS subjects differed. The evaluations of appropriateness of *Recreation, weather, and travel* by Indonesians (.45), Koreans (.33), and Arabs (.29) did not show even moderate associations with those of NSs.

Self

Similarly, none of the NNSs ratings of appropriateness correlated with those by NSs on the topic cluster of *Self*. Although some researchers (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Tannen, 1984) have noted that in some English-speaking societies, talking about self can be considered one of the ways of establishing social and conversational rapport, Lii-Shi (1988), Hu & Grove (1991), Befu (1986), and Nydell (1987) comment that talking about self is not viewed as appropriate in many other cultures. These authors further observe that talking about oneself may make one appear self-centered, unconcerned, and socially unastute. An implication of this observation is that talking about oneself, commonly accepted in the U.S. (Tannen, 1984), may not accomplish its purpose of interactional cooperativeness.

Residence

The rankings of topics dealing with *Residence* elicited responses that were least consistent (see Table 1) and most diverse (see Table 2). In fact, the correlation coefficients between NSs and Chinese (.98) demonstrated a very strong direct relationship, followed by those between NSs and Arabs (.90). On the other hand, the rankings of Koreans were in a very strong inverse relationship to those of NSs (-.81), implying that the judgments of Korean subjects regarding the appropriateness of *Residence* topics was quite different from that of NSs. The rankings of NSs and the Japanese were in a weak negative correlation (-.10), and NSs and Indonesians correlated only marginally (.41).

According to Schneider (1988, p.241), "residence is one of the most common and conventionalized" topics that can be used in almost any conversational situation. However, this finding may be true for members of only some language communities; the correlation coefficients of NS and NNS rankings of appropriateness for the *Residence* topic cluster indicate that non-Westerners, in this case Indonesians, Japanese, and particularly Koreans are likely to find it inappropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

As has been noted, the findings in this study are preliminary. The topics in the questionnaire used in this study were solicited from and evaluated for appropriateness by a group of subjects who were all students and of a similar age. The sample is unbalanced for linguistic generalization, but can be useful in designing ESL curriculum. Actual conversational data pertaining to "safe" and "dangerous" topics in cross-cultural social interactions can be collected

and analyzed to verify, amend, or expand upon the results obtained through the questionnaire in this study. Clearly, topics appropriate in cross-cultural conversations need to be studied in greater depth before arriving at definitive conclusions.

The findings of this study provide some insight into judgments of topic appropriateness of NSs of American English and those of speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Arabic. The correlation coefficients between the rankings of NSs and other L1-based groups of subjects were high and significant on the topics associated with *Family*. The topics clusters associated with *Classes, grades, and teachers*, followed. Topics associated with *Own Possessions* and *Hearer* seem to be more similarly judged than those associated with *Age, Money, Life in the U.S., Recreation, weather, and travel, Self,* and *Residence*. Although the issue of topic appropriateness in conversational discourse not clear-cut, it also appears to be one of the few that can be taught in general terms within the format of ESL classes and incorporated in the curriculum for teaching L2 speaking skills.

Teaching an awareness that appropriateness of topics varies widely among language groups, that the conversational intent behind a topical line of discussion may be very different from what the student would expect, and that participation in cross-cultural conversations entails sensitivity to verbal and/or non-verbal cues of discomfort and evasion in the hearer can be built into many ESL curricula. Both NSs and NNSs can be taught that their judgments about the appropriateness of some topics are reasonably reliable but unlikely to be so in regard to other topics.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eli Hinkel obtained her Ph.D. in linguistics from The University of Michigan. She directs the ESL Program at Xavier University.

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APPENDIX A: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read all of the instructions carefully. It is important that your responses reflect your own individual opinions.

In the questionnaire, you are asked to evaluate appropriateness of conversational topics. For example:

movie stars

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If you find talking about *movie stars* very inappropriate mark your response as 1. If you believe that talking about movie stars is very appropriate, mark your response as 10. You can mark your responses from 2 through 9 to show your opinion between the two extremes.

When you are responding to the questions, please keep in mind the following imaginary student:

> *N.H. is a [foreign/American] student in your department. The two of you entered the program at the same time and have similar interests in your majors. You have lunch together frequently at a restaurant near campus. When you have lunch together, you talk about all kinds of things.*

CONVERSATIONAL TOPICS

1. whether I am married or not
2. whether I have children
3. my father's/mother's occupation
4. my father's/mother's career
5. my father's/mother's personality
6. my father's/mother's tastes and habits
7. my brothers and sisters
8. my brother's/sister's successes and failures
9. my extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.)
10. the conversations I had with my father or mother
11. the disagreements I have had with my parents
12. my parents' relationship with my brother(s) or sister(s)
13. my parents' relationship
14. my parents' disagreements
15. my father's/mother's relationship(s) with members of my extended family
16. my age
17. my brother(s)' or sister(s)' age(s)
18. my father's age
19. my mother's age
20. ages of members of my extended family
21. where I live
22. whether I like the city where I live
23. whether I dislike the city where I live
24. why I chose this place to live
25. whether I like or dislike my apartment
26. the conveniences that my apartment has
27. the problems I have had with the facilities in my residence
28. my roommate(s)
29. what I like about life in the U.S.A.
30. what I dislike about life in the U.S.A.

31. what I like about people in the U.S.A.
32. what I dislike about people in the U.S.A.
33. the characteristics of Americans which I find striking or surprising
34. how Americans use time
35. American politics
36. American religions
37. American food habits
38. how Americans behave in certain situations
39. the characteristics of the American society which I find striking or surprising
40. whether I am homesick
41. aspects of American English that I find striking or surprising
42. the meaning and usage of particular English structures and expressions
43. how much money I have or make
44. how much money my father has or makes
45. how much I pay for rent
46. how much my clothes or jewelry cost
47. how much my car costs
48. how much some of my special possessions (camera, computer, etc.) cost
49. how much money N.H. has or makes
50. how much money N.H.'s father has or makes
51. how much N.H. pays for rent
52. how much N.H.'s clothes or jewelry cost
53. how much N.H.'s car costs
54. how much some of N.H.'s special possessions (camera, computer, etc.) cost
55. what classes I am taking
56. the classes I enjoy
57. the classes I don't like
58. my grades
59. why I received a particular grade
60. my teachers whom I like
61. my teachers whom I don't like
62. my teachers' personalities
63. my teachers' way of teaching
64. weather if it's terrible or unusual
65. weather if it's normal
66. what I read for fun (entertainment)
67. TV programs or shows
68. the sports I like to play
69. the sports I am good at
70. the sports I am not good at
71. where I have traveled
72. whether I liked the places I have traveled to
73. whether I didn't like the places I have traveled to
74. what I do on weekends and/or during my free time

75. my clothes or jewelry
76. where I bought clothes or jewelry
77. some of my special possessions (camera, computer, etc.)
78. my musical equipment (stereo, compact disk players, etc.)
79. particular features of my special possessions (camera, computer, musical equipment)
80. particular features of my car
81. why I bought this particular car
82. the food I like or dislike
83. my personality
84. my life in my country
85. what I like about life in my country
86. what I dislike about life in my country
87. what I used to do in the past
88. a car accident that I saw in which I was not involved
89. a car accident in which I was involved
90. something wonderful that I did or said
91. something that made me happy or proud of myself
92. something that embarrassed me or some embarrassing experience
93. something stupid that I did or said
94. N.H.'s clothes or jewelry
95. some of N.H.'s special possessions (camera, computer, etc.)
96. N.H.'s classes, grades, and teachers
97. the food N.H. likes or dislikes
98. N.H.'s past experiences and what N.H. did in the past
99. N.H.'s political beliefs
100. whom N.H. dates or wants to date
101. N.H.'s happy moments
102. N.H.'s embarrassing moments
103. the people whom we both know and whom N.H. likes
104. the people whom we both know and whom N.H. doesn't like

APPENDIX B: COMPLETE RANK CORRELATION MATRICES FOR TOPIC CLUSTERS

Rank Correlation Matrix 1
Topic Cluster: Family and Family Members

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.92*	1.00				
JP	0.75*	0.73*	1.00			
KR	0.90*	0.93*	0.87*	1.00		
IN	0.84*	0.88*	0.85*	0.92*	1.00	
AR	0.91*	0.95*	0.68*	0.92*	0.84*	1.00

*(=.52(p 05)N = 15)

Rank Correlation Matrix 2
Topic Cluster: Age

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.67	1.00				
JP	0.30	0.82	1.00			
KR	0.90*	0.82	0.60	1.00		
IN	0.98*	0.76	0.46	0.98*	1.00	
AR	0.70	0.67	0.70	0.90*	0.82	1.00

*(= .89 (p .05) N = 5)

Rank Correlation Matrix 3
Topic Cluster: Classes, Grades, and Teachers

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.80*	1.00				
JP	0.80*	0.78*	1.00			
KR	0.60	0.38	0.62	1.00		
IN	0.90*	0.95*	0.82*	0.47	1.00	
AR	0.76*	0.75*	0.70*	0.36	0.75*	1.00

*(= .68 (p .05) N = 9)

Rank Correlation Matrix 4
Topic Cluster: Hearer

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	-0.23	1.00				
JP	0.80*	-0.28	1.00			
KR	0.74*	0.02	0.83*	1.00		
IN	0.47	0.03	0.69*	0.86*	1.00	
AR	0.73*	0.11	0.82*	0.99*	0.83*	1.00

*(= .61 (p .05) N = 11)

Rank Correlation Matrix 5
Topic Cluster: Money

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.64*	1.00				
JP	0.58	0.87*	1.00			
KR	0.37	0.59*	0.67*	1.00		
IN	0.52	0.35	0.61*	0.73*	1.00	
AR	0.50	0.81*	0.88*	0.68*	0.41	1.00

*(= .59 (p .05) N = 12)

Rank Correlation Matrix 6
Topic Cluster: Own Possessions

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.21	1.00				
JP	0.96*	0.39	1.00			
KR	0.83*	0.16	0.88*	1.00		
IN	0.89*	0.17	0.86*	0.83*	1.00	
AR	0.68	0.42	0.64	0.43	0.61	1.00

*(= .79 (p .05) N = 7)

Rank Correlation Matrix 7
Topic Cluster: Life in the U.S.A.

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.53*	1.00				
JP	0.56*	0.12	1.00			
KR	0.30	0.16	0.65*	1.00		
IN	0.58*	0.29	0.60*	0.67*	1.00	
AR	0.45	0.56*	0.37	0.49	0.77*	1.00

*(= .52 (p .05) N = 15)

Rank Correlation Matrix 8
Topic Cluster: Recreation, Weather, and Travel

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.80*	1.00				
JP	0.59*	0.76*	1.00			
KR	0.33	0.44	0.60*	1.00		
IN	0.45	0.42	-0.05	0.26	1.00	
AR	0.29	0.43	0.28	0.49	0.32	1.00

*(= .59 (p .05) N = 12)

Rank Correlation Matrix 9
Topic Cluster: Self

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.19	1.00				
JP	0.20	0.80*	1.00			
KR	0.17	0.34	0.32	1.00		
IN	0.03	0.70*	0.42	0.63*	1.00	
AR	0.15	0.85*	0.77*	0.24	0.56	1.00

*(= .59 (p .05) N = 12)

Rank Correlation Matrix 10
Topic Cluster: Residence

	NSs	CH	JP	KR	IN	AR
NSs	1.00					
CH	0.98*	1.00				
JP	-0.10	-0.19	1.00			
KR	-0.81*	-0.83*	0.38	1.00		
IN	0.41	0.36	0.55	-0.26	1.00	
AR	0.90*	0.81	0.00	-0.74*	0.61	1.00

*(= .74 (p .05) N = 8)